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SUBJECT: THE GRUNTLED AND DISGRUNTLED - AFGHAN PRESIDENTIAL  
RUNNER-UPS CONTEMPLATE THEIR NEXT MOVES

Classified By: Political Counselor Annie Pforzheimer for reasons: 1.4 (a) (e)

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment. The Embassy met separately with each of the leading electoral also-rans - Abdullah, Bashardost, Ghani and Yasini -- over the past week to gauge their reactions to the outcome of the election and discuss future plans. Apart from Karzai, these are the only candidates to garner more than one percent of the vote as announced by the Independent Electoral Commission, with Abdullah Abdullah at 30.59 percent, Ramazan Bashardost at 10.46 percent, Ashraf Ghani at 2.94 percent and Mirwais Yasini at 1.03 percent. Of the four, Ghani and Yasini appear to be jockeying for positions in the government. Bashardost seems intent on advancing his movement outside of government, but his prospects are uncertain. Abdullah is ambivalent, reluctant to abandon the movement he started, but aware that it may not be sustainable if, as seems likely, Rabbani cuts a deal with Karzai. In sum, it is too soon to predict whether an effective "loyal opposition" can coalesce around leading candidates who opposed Karzai. End Summary and Comment.

ABDULLAH

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¶2. (S) In a meeting with the Ambassador on November 8, Abdullah reviewed his views on his future, either as the head of a loyal opposition, a think tank, or most unlikely, the head of a commission to review the government system (that would change the government to a Parliamentary system.) Abdullah said, referring to his influential supporter Professor Rabbani, that there would likely be some "political casualties," hinting that Rabbani was cutting himself a deal with Karzai for positions. Separately, Abdullah's special assistant Omar Gafoorzai said he has warned Abdullah that he needs to make sure he is informed of the details of Rabbani's meetings with Karzai, implying that this was not taking place. Abdullah said Karzai Vice President Marshall Fahim also approached him about landing a job in the Karzai government, but Abdullah refused to work with an intermediary, and claimed he told Fahim he wanted policy changes, not a job. Abdullah said he planned to stay in Afghanistan, and that it would be "irresponsible" to leave now. (Comment: It appeared that Abdullah was getting significant pressure from some of his key supporters to make a deal with Karzai for jobs - Gafoorzai also confirmed this separately, and said he advised Abdullah to make these deals. His support base who is not high enough rank to get a job, however, is pressuring him hard to not make a deal with Karzai out of principle. Abdullah consistently has told us he listens first and foremost to his support base. End Comment.)

¶3. (S) When Ambassador Eikenberry asked him about the first steps in creating this loyal opposition group, Abdullah replied that he needed to take care of some "unfinished sensitive business" with his supporters, namely the status of the two governors that supported him in the elections.

Abdullah received a call from Lower House Speaker Qanooni during the meeting, and later Abdullah noted at this meeting he would start to suggest that the National Front (NF) should dissolve. At this point, he planned to talk to each of the factions within the NF to determine if the loyal opposition was a real possibility, noting he would do this "swiftly." He said the NF had been split in two over the presidential elections, and it made sense to make a change.

14. (C) The Ambassador congratulated Abdullah on his tempered message to his people, calling on them to accept the election result as final. Abdullah said he continues to have meetings with his followers, and noted that this dialogue with his disappointed followers, not his final decision, was the "hardest part." He said he deliberately avoided the question of the legitimacy of the government in his press statement. The Ambassador said that in the Western tradition, an election is not politically over until there is some form of communication between the two key candidates, and noted he had asked Karzai to call Abdullah. He said this might pave the way for the Secretary of State to be able to meet with Dr. Abdullah when she comes for the inauguration. Abdullah noted there might be some positives for him from a perception view if he meets with Karzai, but that his supporters will be disappointed if they view him as giving in to Karzai. He thanked the Ambassador for asking Karzai to call him.

15. (C) Abdullah noted that Karzai recently allowed General Rashid Dostum to cloak him in his presidential garments, a gesture that Abdullah said echoed a traditional Afghan ceremony, implying that Dostum was now the highest moral authority in Afghanistan. He said this was an indication of

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how Karzai viewed his second term. (Comment: other Afghans have a more benign interpretation of the cloaking ceremony, saying it is a case of Dostum honoring Karzai, not vice versa. Nonetheless, it is a bad sign that the Palace gave the event significant press play, including television coverage. End Comment.)

16. (S) In a conversation November 12 with Polcouns, Abdullah aide Omar Gafoorzai said that Abdullah's activities had been essentially confined to what he had told the Ambassador: a prolonged set of conversations with his disappointed former supporters, explaining his decision to withdraw and not "boycott" the second round of elections. Abdullah, he said, did not have immediate plans to launch his political movement. Gafoorzai noted that Rabbani's talks with the Palace had been suspended for more than four days at that point.

BASHARDOST

17. (C) Under the shade of his roadside tent, in fluent, idiomatic English, Ramazan Bashardost explained to us in a November 8 meeting his main achievement: bringing the Afghan public a genuinely democratic experience. He had received no money from anyone and all his votes represented the choice of individual Afghans, not those of warlords or tribal strongmen. He had visited 27 provinces without a bodyguard, including provinces of every ethnic group and had received votes from all over the country. The Afghan way of politics was conspiracies, coalitions and payoffs. He had followed a different path and despite his having no television ads, over half a million Afghans had endorsed his vision. Ordinary people did not care about the debates in Kabul. When he asked them if they preferred a parliamentary to a presidential system, they responded: "what are those, something to eat?"

18. (C) Bashardost said he was heartened by the progress he had made, but said that building a new system would start with a new generation. Afghans had now experienced communism and the Islamism of the Taliban and they were ready for

something new from a new generation of leaders. They were ready for the kinds of values that America stands for, but it was important that America not compromise those values in its dealings with the current generation of leaders. We should not be misled by the anti-American rhetoric of politicians in parliament. If America remained true to its values, they would be welcome in Afghanistan for 200 years.

¶9. (C) Bashardost said that both the Abdullah and Karzai camps had tried to recruit him immediately after the first round. He had declined both. Afghan politicians assumed he was after ministries or jobs, but he was politician, not a businessman. Most of the people associated with Karzai and Abdullah, he said, "don't belong in the cabinet -- they belong in court."

GHANI

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¶10. (C) Ashraf Ghani reported to us November 7 that Karzai had been trying to woo him, proposing that he head a revived Afghanistan Aid Coordination Authority (AACA). (Comment: Embassy contacts in the Palace dispute this. End Note.) Ghani said he had made clear that he would not accept unless two conditions were met. First the AACA would have to have authority over security sector assistance - a stipulation that Karzai had not agreed to. Second, the United States would have to agree to radically reform its assistance contracting procedures, which were currently undermining the government. Ghani was not optimistic that they would reach an agreement, saying that Karzai wanted Ghani's name, but not his competence. He knew that once inside the tent, Ghani would be loyal, but Ghani could not be loyal to a system he did not believe in.

¶11. (C) Ghani spoke favorably about the five elements of the proposed post-election compact between Karzai and the Afghan people, saying they had the right mix of elements desired by the respective parties to the compact (Le., Karzai, the Afghan people, and the international community). However, he emphasized that the elements needed to be operationalized.

YASINI

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¶12. (C) MP Mirwais Yasini told Embassy reps November 7 that calling off the second round of the election had probably been a good decision and that Karzai would have won, in any

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case. He felt personally victimized by the electoral fraud conducted by the Karzai campaign, saying that as a Pashtun, he had suffered disproportionately because fraud had been most prevalent in Pashtun areas where Abdullah had not been competitive anyway. After the first round, Karzai had asked Yasini to support him and declare that the election had been fair, but had not offered him anything in return. Some Karzai advisors had told him that an offer was in the works, but he did not believe them. Karzai would likely not give away any positions unless pressured to do so by the international community.

¶13. (S) Yasini took a dim view of current reintegration and reconciliation initiatives. First of all, there was a need for much better understanding of the mentality of the Taliban. The goal should not be to win over Mullah Omar, but rather to politically disrupt his support base, which required a better understanding of its motivations. Second, there was a need for much stronger leadership in Kabul. Yasini was doubtful that the Karzai family had a genuine interest in achieving reconciliation. The president's brother, Qayum, was involved only for the money, he said. As currently constituted, reconciliation efforts would not go anywhere. Although the Saudis had genuine influence, the Afghan government lacked the necessary desire, he added, calling Karzai's interest in reconciliation an election

tactic.

#### COMMON THEMES

##### On Karzai:

¶14. (C) Yasini and Ghani both focused on the grave damage to Karzai's legitimacy in the wake of the election and both said he must act quickly to repair it. Yasini gave him 12-14 months. Ghani gave him only 2-3. Yasini said he had told Karzai directly that if he wanted "a good place in Afghan history" he would have to listen to the Afghan people and to the international community and "clean up his friends." Bashardost said Karzai was a good man, who wanted the best for his country but who didn't believe in governance because he had a tribal outlook. Bashardost recounted that after a 2004 New York Times article on Ahmad Wali Karzai's possible ties to drug trafficking, Karzai had called a Cabinet meeting at which all ministers were required to assert that they were on Karzai's side and that the NY Times was part of a conspiracy against him. Ghani and Abdullah had both complied. Bashardost did not. He had told Karzai that the issue was not who was for or against him, but rather whether the charges were false and could be challenged. But, said Bashardost, because of Karzai's tribal outlook, protecting the honor of his family (especially an older brother) came foremost. Even if Ahmad Wali had committed a murder in Karzai's presence, Karzai would feel bound to deny it and would protect him from the law.

¶15. (C) Ghani volunteered some advice on how to manage relations with Karzai, claiming that he and Lakhdar Brahimi were the only two people that Karzai listened to. First, Karzai did not deal well with dictates; giving him a limited number of acceptable options was more effective. Second, it was useful to give Karzai deadlines, provided they were defensible. Finally, Karzai was not averse to delegating responsibility, but it was important to encourage him to delegate to individuals who would not abuse their freedom of action.

##### On Abdullah:

¶16. (C) Yasini surmised that Abdullah had withdrawn from the second round primarily to preserve his honor, knowing that he could not win. He expected that Abdullah would continue to seek "some kind of participation in the government," noting that his main backer, Rabbani, had already done so. Ghani stressed that Abdullah should not be underestimated, but could not identify a clear path forward for him, instead offering several possibilities: first, if he could keep his coalition together, he had a shot at gaining a Parliamentary majority in upcoming elections, which might enable him to reopen the constitution -long an Abdullah objective. Second, he might be marginalized, for example if Rabbani, Qanooni or Wali Massoud withdrew their support or Governor Atta lost his position. Third, he might join the government in a specialized role, for example as head of a constitutional reform commission.

##### On Cabinet Formation:

¶17. (C) All of the former candidates emphasized the

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importance of getting the cabinet right, seeing it as a litmus test of Karzai's political will. Yasini urged that the U.S. engage intensively to ensure a strong, clean cabinet, including by offering Karzai evidence on corruption by potential cabinet figures, and offered himself as a possible Attorney General. There were good people who should stay in the cabinet, such as the ministers of Agriculture and of Reconstruction and Rural Development, but "profound change" was essential, he said. The first priority should be getting the right people in Karzai's kitchen cabinet, second

order priorities were the rest of the cabinet and local  
government.  
EIKENBERRY